

Decorate a synagogue for Shavuot by placing branches, leafy arrangements, or potted plants in approved areas before the festival begins. The greenery reflects a custom associated with Shavuot, though practices differ among Jewish communities, so ask the synagogue's rabbi or leaders what is appropriate.

Why greenery belongs in some Shavuot celebrations

Many Jewish communities have a custom of bringing greenery into the synagogue for Shavuot. The festival is connected to the spring harvest, and greenery can bring that agricultural setting into the room where the community gathers.

Some explanations also connect the custom to Mount Sinai, where the Torah was given. Green plants offer a visual way to recall those associations, but their use is a custom rather than a requirement observed everywhere. Some communities do not decorate with plants, so a quick conversation before planning matters.

Choose places that welcome greenery

Start with the entrance, where a pair of potted plants or a simple leafy arrangement can mark the festival without changing the prayer space. In a social hall, small arrangements on tables leave room for food, books, and conversation.

Inside the sanctuary, ask which surfaces and areas may be used. The ark, Torah scrolls, and prayer books deserve particular care. Keep plants and water away from them, and do not attach decorations to furnishings or walls without permission.

Leave aisles, exits, and access routes clear. Choose stable containers that cannot easily tip, and keep leaves away from candles, lights, and electrical equipment. A modest arrangement in a safe place can be more useful than greenery spread across every surface.

Prepare and place the decorations

1. Ask the synagogue about its customs, available space, and any concerns about allergies or strong scents. This helps you choose plants that people can comfortably be around.
2. Pick sturdy greenery that looks fresh and suits the room. Potted plants can be moved without a vase of water, while cut branches need a stable, watertight container.
3. Check leaves and containers for insects, loose soil, and drips before bringing them inside. Protect tables and floors from moisture.
4. Arrange everything before the festival begins, following the synagogue's guidance about holiday observance. Step back and check sight lines, walkways, and seating.
5. Make a plan for removing or sharing the plants after the festival. Someone should know where the containers belong and how the space will be cleaned.

Questions about Shavuot greenery

Are flowers appropriate as well as branches?

They can be, if the synagogue welcomes them. Ask about local practice and consider unscented or lightly scented choices for a shared indoor space.

Can decorations be placed near the ark?

Only with the synagogue's approval. Keep foliage and water clear of the ark and Torah scrolls, and make sure nothing obstructs access.

Can greenery be gathered during the festival?

Prepare it beforehand and ask the rabbi about any questions of holiday observance. That leaves time to check each arrangement and place it safely.

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